

The Song of Glory

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[0 : 00] So if you would turn to Psalm 96 in the Old Testament part of the Bible, page 499, that prayer was not trying to say our singing isn't very good, you've been singing very well.

But I want us to look this morning at Psalm 96. It is such a happy psalm. It's such a contrast to the news and the atrocities that we hear weekly.

And it's such a different spirit, I think, from our own self-interested and sluggish spirits. You look at the first lines. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth, sing to the Lord, bless his name.

And the psalms, like all of scriptures, are not an exercise in spiritual denial, but the very opposite. This psalm wraps its arms around terrible struggle and injustice, around suffering and inequity and everything that is worthless, but directs our focus to the one who's coming.

What's disorienting about reading this psalm is the focus is not on all that's wrong, but all that's right, and all that will be right. And it teaches us how to sing and how to long for God.

[1 : 28] And the psalm is not really aimed at your mind so much as it's aimed at your singiness. It's not aimed at belief, it's aimed at worship.

And you know, of course, that singing is a very big deal in the Bible. Birds sing. Forests sing. And people sing.

Singing defines a people. What you sing shows what brings you real joy. There's a Scottish writer that says, if you can sing the songs of a people, it doesn't really matter who makes the laws.

The issue in the Bible is not whether you sing in tune or out of tune or whether you're musically gifted. Thank goodness. The issue is what makes you sing.

I think it was C.S. Lewis who said, music is like wine. It can be used to make people drunk or it can be used to celebrate the sacrament. So Israel celebrated and danced and sang when they celebrated the festivals of God's great acts.

[2 : 37] They sang laments to God in times of trouble. And they sang songs in defiance against God as well. You remember the day of the golden calf?

That's right. They sang hymns to the golden calf. Songs of the calf. And Psalm 96, we get to hear some of the deepest music ever sung.

It is the song that is being sung in heaven now. And we are invited to join in. This is the song of our lives.

And I want to just fly over it and then go into a bit of detail. I want you to see that the psalm has three sections. 1 to 6, 7 to 9 and 10 to the end.

And the first two sections echo each other. So look at verses 1 to 6. It begins, sing, sing, sing to the Lord.

[3 : 34] Three compelling commands. And then it applies it. And then verse 7, ascribe, ascribe, ascribe. Three compelling commands. And then application.

And then verse 10, we join in unison. And all creation sings. And then you get this thrilling song of this new song.

So what I want to do is I want to look at the two parts, the two first parts together. And then the third part. So I've really got two points. And the first two sections together I've called the song that is due.

And the second, the last part, I've called the song that is new. So firstly then, the song that is due.

So the psalm begins with these three commands to sing.

And did you notice that they are completely universal and inclusive? Sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name.

[4 : 32] Sing to the Lord.

To God or to the name of God. And when we do that, we begin to sing a new song. Because we begin to taste something of the freshness of the mercy and goodness of God, which is constantly new.

Sing, sing, sing. The second lot of commands are a little bit more pointy. See verse 7. Three times we're summoned to ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.

So verse 7. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples. Ascribe to the Lord the glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.

Now, this word ascribe means you need to make a decision and a change. It is as though someone comes across a copy of Shakespeare's plays and falls in love with them without knowing where they come from or who wrote them.

[5 : 59] And that person gathers people together and they perform the plays and they create a theatre company and they begin to make a good living. And then one day someone comes along and says, you know, they were written by a man called William Shakespeare.

Well, all of a sudden you have a choice about whether you are going to ascribe to Shakespeare the honour due to him being the author.

Let's take a more contemporary illustration. Perhaps a friend comes to you with an idea for an online game. Let's call it, for example, Pokemon Stay. And you sell them online and you get a letter from Nintendo and it's all about ascribing copyright where it's due.

Well, just so. The psalm comes to us with this truth that the Lord reigns and it says we have a choice. And what does it mean to ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name?

The psalmist spells it out in four little steps. You see, each one have to do with entering closer into fellowship with God, drawing nearer to him. Verse 8. Bring an offering.

[7 : 13] Come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendour of holiness. Tremble before him all the earth. Take just one of those, the idea of offering.

The idea of offering to God in the Old Testament was both the way God opened the door for us to come to him and the way that we give the Lord our best.

And in the New Testament, our offerings and sacrifices include these kinds of things. Brotherly love. Showing hospitality.

Visiting people in prison. Sexual purity. Practicing contentment. Keeping our lives free from the love of money. Rejecting false teaching.

Submitting to our spiritual leaders. That's Dan's favourite. All these things and more are due to the Lord. What is due to the Lord is more glory than we can imagine.

[8 : 16] I mean, we owe him our existence. Daily he gives us more. He makes the sun shine on the just and the unjust. But there is a perversity in us where we don't, we just don't like it that we have to pay due to God.

We, you know, we like it when people owe us things. But we seem reluctant to give God glory. And we have to be commanded to ascribe him what is due.

And this brings us to the only negative note in the psalm. And why it's so important. And the main negative note in this is when our worship is misdirected.

When we worship the wrong things. Look back at verse 4. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols. We were made by God the Lord to worship God the Lord. But what we do is we exchange the glory that is due his name.

[9 : 22] And we ascribe that glory to other things. And we worship other things. Now you may not literally bow down to them or have some formal liturgy going.

But all of us have things in our lives that we love and we give our energy to and our imagination.

And we have this desperate hope that those things will somehow make us happy. And we take the worship that is due God alone.

And we give it to these things that we imagine are going to give us security. And we create gods.

And all the nations of the earth create gods. And the psalmist sweeps them aside and says they're worthless.

Empty. Negative. Non-entities. They have no real existence. They did not make the heavens. They cannot save us. Now in pagan religion the supreme being was always a total mystery.

The supreme being might have been able to make it rain from time to time. So long as you paid the dues. But he could never speak clearly. And if the deity speaks it's in mumbled mysteries which you

have to interpret.

[10 : 34] The God of the Bible is very different. He is a communicating God. God does not communicate by mime. He's not a shy God if you will.

He speaks. He reveals. He writes with his finger in stone. The way he created the world in the beginning is by speaking words. His connection with us is by words.

And as humans we were created to be his image. Which means we were part of our uniqueness is the ability to be able to hear and understand and to respond and enter into meaningful communication and relation with him.

But this psalm tells us that it is the mission of God to reclaim creation and to restore worship in all the earth.

But that depends on the reality of God revealing himself to us. Stay with me. See without the revelation of God to us.

[11 : 35] All that we can say about God is merely human opinion. Your view of God and my view of God are just as flawed as each other.

Or yours might be more accurate but we'd never be able to know. Unless God is able to speak and speak clearly I think we should all be religious pluralists. Because then all religious ideas would be equally valid expressions of our human longings.

And you could choose your religion and your religious expression based on what works for you.

Like you can choose the colours of your kitchen or the restaurant you like.

But if God has revealed himself clearly and personally. If he has revealed his own name. Then all the gods of the nations are non-entities. And the only thing we can do is to worship him.

And the one thing in this psalm which explains the energy and confidence is the name of God. I want to show you this please.

[12 : 41] So you see it in the third command. In the two third commands. You see verses 1 and 2. Sing, sing, sing.

The last command is sing to the Lord bless his name. And then in verse 8 you have ascribe, ascribe, ascribe, ascribe. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Because the key to worship is knowing the one who you worship.

And the way the Bible speaks about the identity of God is to direct us to the revelation of his name. The Bible is based on this. The Bible is based on this. That God has revealed to us his own name. It hasn't been discovered by some clever clucks some years ago. But in the book of Exodus God made his name known to Moses.

First in the burning bush and then at Sinai. Now, I want to take you and show you this in the book of Exodus. In the last couple of months when I've made references elsewhere in the Bible, I haven't asked you to turn to it.

[13 : 43] But I think we're getting lazy. So what we should do is... Well, you might. I might be. So if you would keep your hand in Psalm 96 and turn back to Exodus chapter 33 please.

Exodus chapter 33.

We're going to begin at verse 18. I won't give too much of the context because there's so much in this little section. In Exodus 33, 18.

We read this. Moses said, and he's praying to God. Moses said, please show me your glory. Now, what God does next is very important.

And God said, he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim before you my name, the Lord.

[14 : 43] And you notice there, the Lord. Lord is in capitals. Capital L, capital O, capital R, capital B. And I'll be gracious to whom I'll be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

But you cannot see my face for man cannot see me and live. Now, when the word Lord is in capitals, for those of you who are interested in this, it's important.

It's not a general name. It's not a general word for a superior person like a landlord. When it's in capitals, it's the personal name of God, which we're not sure how to pronounce.

And anywhere in the Bible, when you get capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, it is the personal name of God that he has revealed. Moses said, I want to see your glory. But God says, I'm going to declare to you the goodness of my name.

Look down at chapter 34, verse 5. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood before him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

[15:55] The Lord, there's the name. The Lord, the Lord, he says it twice. A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, as we looked at last week. Keeping steadfast love for thousands.

Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. But who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the father on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation. And Moses does the only thing that he can do. He quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped. Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel says that the God of Israel is a name, not a notion. A notion is something you conceive. A name is someone you call upon. A notion, a notion is what you define and describe, but a name evokes the person.

A notion, a notion, a notion, a notion, a notion, a notion of the Lord. A notion, a notion, a notion of the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord. And God has given us his name so that we may call on him. And this is the great privilege of Psalm 96. I want to take you back and just tie this thread in, please. You go back to Psalm 96.

[17:09] The Psalm is just reveling in the name of the Lord, capital L's. You see, verse 1, sing to the Lord, verse 1, sing to the Lord, verse 2, sing to the Lord, verse 4.

Great is the Lord, verse 5, the Lord, verse 7, the Lord, the Lord, verse 8, verse 9, verse 10, verse 12. 11 times in the Psalm.

The personal name of God. That's why the mission of God is universal. See, look at verse 2. Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. That is, the word declare is the word from which we get preaching good news.

See, the reason God has revealed his name to us is not just to make us safe. It's not just to make our lives better. It's not to make our lives work well.

[18:13] It's more than even delivering us from sin and evil and death. The reason God has revealed his name is to restore us to true worship, to restore his whole world to true worship, to ascribe to him the glory due his name.

It's been a controversial week in the Tour de France. That's a bicycle race, which has nothing to do with doping. I don't know how many of you follow this, but by far the best rider in the race is Chris Froome, who grew up in Kenya.

He's won the race twice before. Day 12 was a brutal climb up a ridiculously steep hill at the end.

And Froome and two others accelerated away from all their rivals far ahead of the pack.

And there were thousands of people crowding on the road so that one of the TV crew motorcycles ran over Froome's bike and he and the other two crashed and broke their bikes.

And in the confusion, Froome got up and he started running up the mountain. You're not supposed to do that when you're riding in the Tour de France.

[19:23] It was as though every fibre in his being was set on getting to the top of the mountain. I thought it was great. And of course, all the other riders bypassed him very quickly.

But because the accident happened in the last kilometre, the race officials did what was absolutely right and they gave him the victory. But the crowd that was waiting at the end, that had only seen the end of the race, when Froome stood up to be awarded the first on that day, the yellow jersey, they booed him because they'd only seen the last hundred yards.

They thought he hadn't won. And the TV commentators, the channel that I was watching, who had seen the whole thing, said this. They said, The crowd ought to be ashamed of themselves. Froome earned his win.

They should give him his due. We have a sense that things are wrong when people are not given their due. But there's nothing more due than the song of praise and worship to the Lord who has given us his name.

Secondly, we move from the song that's due to the song that's new and very quickly. And you may be tracking with me so far, but you may say, yeah, but it still leaves our world in a mess.

[20:42] You know, in one sense, the more we focus on the splendor and majesty of God, the more we see the darkness and foolishness of the worship of idols and our own, the mess we seem to be making.

But what is new about the song is this. It's not new because we invent the lines. It's new partly because it's going to be a fresh discovery by all the earth and to recognize the Lord and his rule.

But from verse 10 to the end, we discover something that is utterly new, which has the power to make everything new. It is the promise of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who will bring the reign of God and the judgment of God and the righteous joy of God.

Something is going to happen which is going to make things new. And so we have this breathless announcement twice. The Lord will come. It's such big news in Hebrew when something is repeated immediately after itself.

It's very big news. Did you notice it down at the end of verse? Well, at the beginning of verse 13. Sing for joy before the Lord for he comes, for he comes.

[21 : 54] It's not an error, copying error. And it is this newness which is the focus of the last part of the psalm. It begins in verse 10 where the whole message of the whole Bible is distilled into one little phrase, the Lord reigns, as Dan said.

The message of the Bible is not that God's got a wonderful plan for your life. It's not that he's going to turn away all disharmony and create a universal brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind.

It is this, the Lord reigns. And that is very, very good news. Just think about it. In the face of the current violence and atrocities and uncertainties, the Lord reigns.

Think back on the 20th century. By any reckoning, the 20th century was record-breaking in carnage and tyranny. Politically motivated deaths are estimated at over 200 million people.

90 million to wars. Communism and democratic governments together are responsible for over 110 million dead in the 20th century. Do you know the number of Christians martyred in the 20th century is somewhere above 45 million?

[23 : 20] You know, as a race, we are terrible at ruling. We're terrible at governing. But the Lord rules in splendor and majesty.

His wisdom is infinite. There's nothing hidden from him. There is no thought or there's no word or no deed or intention that can be hidden from the eyes of him.

His truthfulness and his faithfulness are unchanging and unmatched. And his holiness and mercy together are unique. To say the Lord reigns is a statement of massive hope and faith.

Can you imagine how ridiculous it sounded 1000 BC when this was said? Surrounded by Egypt and Persia and Babylon and Syria.

They would have heard this psalm and said, your God's doing a terrible job. And I think that's why the prophecy of this psalm is so important. The psalm is not rehearsing for us tired theological truths.

[24 : 23] It's a prophecy of a specific thing that's going to happen. An extraordinary display of God's reign where God will set up his kingdom. A kingdom that can never be shaken.

And when he does that, all the nations of the earth will be able to share his grace and favor. He's looking to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it may seem strange, but one of the central joys of this hope comes three times in this last verses.

And it is this, that the Lord will judge. You see verse 10, the Lord will judge the earth with equity, evenness, equality, straightforwardness, uprightness.

Verse 13, he will judge the earth. He will judge the earth, the world in righteousness and the peoples in faithfulness. His judgment will be clean and right and restorative.

I think we have a pretty narrow view of judging. We think of criminal trials and television series. But in this, in Hebrew, the word judging is any form of governance and authority.

[25 : 29] It can be used for sailing a straight course. It's coming into a situation where there's chaos and suffering and injustice and it's setting things right. That's the hope.

And it will involve punishment of the guilty. And it will involve the redress of wrongs done to those who are innocent. I don't know how exactly. He will defend and shelter the poor and the needy and those without a voice.

He will set things right. You can't set things right without stopping and punishing what is wrong and deliver those who are ensnared to evil. But the hope of the Bible is that somehow God will make everything that is evil untrue.

It's why it's completely self-defeating to worship anything else or anyone else. Whatever it is that we take meaning from, whatever it is that's most important to us, it's worthless next to this Lord.

And misdirected worship, it steals our singing voice. Our idols promise to us, what our idols promise to us are lies.

[26 : 35] They lie to us about judgment. They lie to us about the fact that the Lord reigns. Idols work with fear. They want to keep us frightened to declare his name among the nations.

We can hardly imagine how good the news is that God should come to judge. And that's why I think we need the help of creation itself. You see, between the first judge and the second two judgments in verse 11, we involve creation.

Verse 11, Let the heavens be glad. Let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar and all that fills it. The fish, the fish are going to take up the roaring song.

Let the field exult and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy. All the animals of the fields. Butterflies, bees, grasshoppers, birds, rabbits, snakes, insects, toads, moles, mice, foals, shrews, lizards, rodents, reptiles, possums, echidnas, platypus.

To say nothing of sheep, goat, cows and horses. And I think creation knows what great news this is because creation is currently caught up in our sin and it groans waiting for God's kingdom to come.

[27 : 51] Do you know, every time someone offers false worship, creation groans. The trees of the field hate it when they're chopped down and made into idols and worshipped. And if nature could say anything today, she would say, don't worship me.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. When we open the New Testament, the first words we hear from Jesus are these. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe in the gospel. And on the night he was crucified, Jesus summarized his ministry and he said this to God. I have manifested your name to the people you gave me out of the world.

For I've given them your words, the words you gave me. And they've received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you and have believed that you sent me.

And in his death, Jesus made a way through the righteous judgment of God so that we might all come to him. Which means that we have more, more reason to sing the song that is due and the song that is new.

[28 : 57] And though Jesus brought the kingdom of God and though God has raised him up and given him all authority in heaven and earth, in his grace and mercy, God is holding back the final judgment to give the opportunity to more and more people around the world to repent and join in the song of praise to God the Father and God the Son.

And this is the promise of the psalm. This is the promise of the whole scriptures. That our world of tears will be replaced by a world of worship. And until then, our role is to sing and declare his glory among the nations.

Sing the song that is due and sing the song that is new. Amen. Amen.